

# The One-Man Log Drive —

By  
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**Y**OU get those logs down through, and you receive your money," Manager Betes, of the Bandsaw Company, said coldly to Trisco Kame, the jobber.

"But, look-a-here, Mr. Betes; can't you understand the fix I'm in? I ain't got the money to pay the loggers; I can't——"

"That's none of my concern," Betes replied coldly. "The contract says that when the logs come down into the boom you are to be paid for the job——"

"Then—then——" Kame stared at the man, unable to believe his ears. "Then you—I can't get paid——"

"Oh, you'll be paid—when you bring the logs down!" Betes permitted a cruel twinkle to enter his eyes and a cruel smile to flicker on his lips.

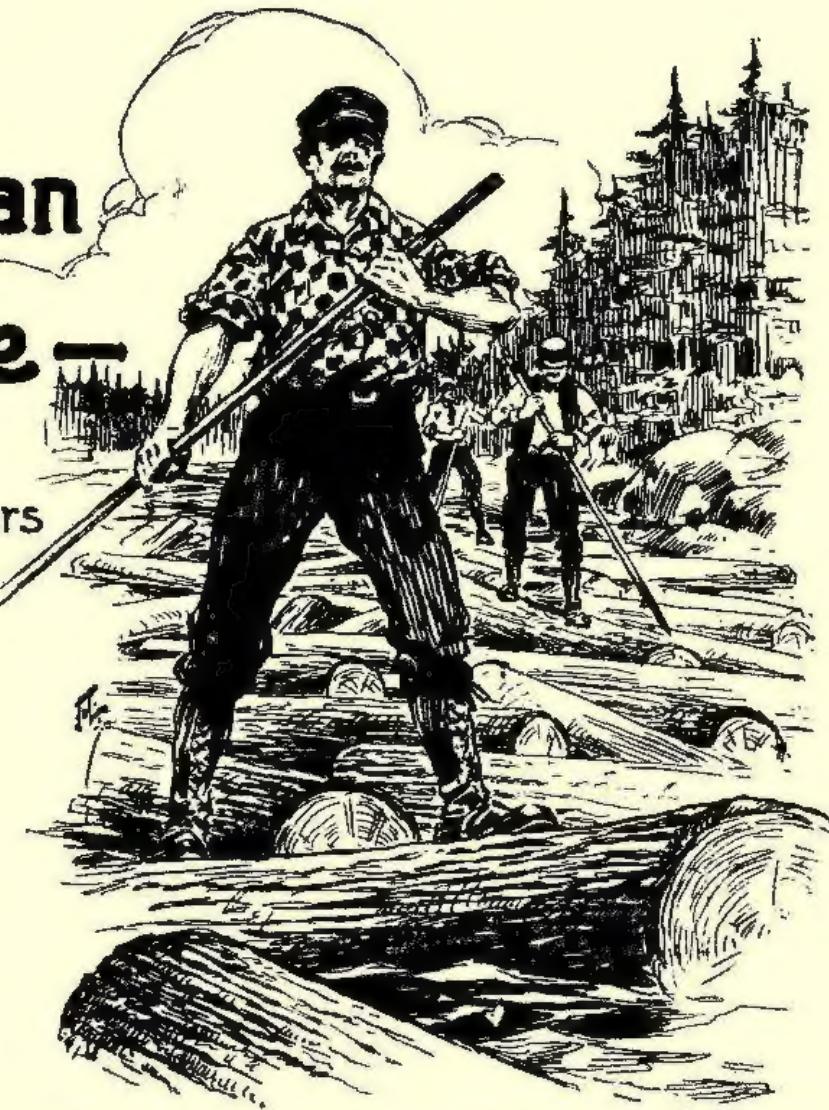
"And if they—if they don't come down?" Kame whispered.

"Oh, if you throw up the job—if you don't show proper energy in taking advantage of the spring high water, we'll have to bring them down ourselves, of course."

Kame staggered back two steps, big, strong, courageous old woodsman that he was. Betes had pronounced sentence upon him. Kame had put all his money into felling, skidding, hauling, and dumping two million feet of spruce and pine into the lower stillwater of Clearwater Creek. Now the spring was at hand, and it was time to go up to the camp with forty loggers to begin the drive.

A few hundred dollars to pay any log drivers who quit, to meet the incidental expenses, to buy supplies at the store—owned by the Bandsaw Company—would see him through. But he had stretched his credit to the last, utmost dollar. He was unable to borrow money anywhere. The Bandsaw Company, masters of credit in the valley, refused him the thing that would save him his contract, save him his life's saving.

In refusing him the credit, they were exercising their privilege, and in exercising their privilege they



could save all the payments due to Kame for the previous summer's cut, winter haul, and the final profit on a good drive. They would get all the work done for the cost of what they called a "sheriff's drive," or a "bondsman's drive" down the river. The scheme would add a matter of twenty-five to thirty thousand dollars to the profits of the company. It would greatly satisfy the manager, who was part owner, and his silent partners as an exhibition of acumen. It was excusable, because it had not been specified that Trisco Kame, the jobber, should receive any payments until the logs were in the boom. That was a detail which five glasses of whisky, during negotiations, had caused Trisco Kame to overlook.

Kame walked backward, as though he expected to be attacked by a man with a club, and as though he was powerless to defend himself. A qualm entered the heart of Manager Betes. Kame was hard hit, and Betes had not expected him to show his wound. Kame was a big man, strong, brave, and a good sport. He had not expected Kame to weaken, break down.

"I say, you——" Betes began, and at the soft words Kame's face flushed from its pallor. Into his eyes returned a certain strength, a certain bracing up under the blow, and at sight of that Betes smiled a very little, for Kame would be strong. "You're not going to give up the contract, are you?" Betes suggested.

"Give it up?" Kame repeated slowly. "You mean quit?"

The woodsman was growing stronger under the staggering blow, which would cost him twenty-five thousand dollars and leave him five thousand dollars in debt instead of with a little fortune of twenty thousand dollars to the good.

"If you are going to give up," Betes suggested, "we'll see that your creditors receive their money. You can start free of debt after your—after the unfortunate enterprise—"

"You dirty scoundrel hound! You cur that yaps at a man in the road! You dog owned by the valet of dogs!" Kame suddenly whispered, and, leaping, he caught the manager of the Bandsaw Company a blow with the flat front of a fist five inches wide and three inches long. Under that crash the nose of Betes flattened down like rubber, and his two eyes popped out as the face left the vicinity of the hand and led the way across the ample office into the corner.

Kame stood staring at the man tumbling in agony on the floor. He looked around expectantly. No one arrived to interfere. It was after nine o'clock in the evening. He had ridden in from Woodsend to Bandsaw Mills, after days of agonizing search for money, to make the final appeal to the company for mercy.

Kame saw the manager spitting out two or three teeth as he sat up on the floor. He saw the tongue of the man wagging and heard choking noises, which gradually turned into mumbled, understandable words.

"Now we will get you!" Betes whimpered. "Now we will fix you! You'll get yours for this! We got you! We got you!"

Kame started toward the man, and swung back his fist for another blow, but from the manager's expression, from his mumbling, from his sitting posture, the logger knew that Betes could not ward off the blow which he could not see coming. Betes was half unconscious. He was broken, and the blood dripped and ran down his face, over his scraggling mustache. Kame could not hit any man who was down.

"I guess you'll look bad 'nough as it is," Kame muttered, and then aloud: "That's what you git, Betes!"

Betes listened to the voice. He struggled to his feet. He leaned weakly against the wall. Whatever else he was, Betes was no coward. He fought his scattered wits and herded them so that he could speak.

"You can kill me, Kame, and they'll hang you for it, but I tell you now you got to get those logs down—or—or you'll—"

"And if I bring 'em down? If I take my crew and bring 'em down—"

"I'll keep the contract!" Betes choked. "You know that, Trisco Kame—I'd 'a' paid your debts but—"

With the flat of his hand Kame slapped the bloody cheek of the manager and sent him spinning around three times, till his legs twisted under him and he fell over his flat-topped desk.

"And I'll keep my contract!" Kame exclaimed. "I'm through beggin', Jenk Betes, d'ye hear? I'm through beggin'!"

Then Kame left the office and strode out into the chill, sap-weather night. He jumped into his cutter in front of the office and started the horse back up the creek ridges. When he crossed the bridge to the south side of the stream, and turned up past the great boom, he could hear the water flushing over the dam in long waves; he could see the black streak of thaw along the banks of the millpond boom; he could see by the pale moonlight that rain was coming soon and that the days for the spring drive had arrived—and he hadn't a dollar with which to pay a livery man to take a log driver up the creek to his job. He didn't even have a man to drive his mortgaged team with the dinners of the crew, supposing he had a cook and grub to serve a crew.

So he drove on up the creek, looking down into the deep valley from the ridge. It was a narrow valley, with many new washes along the stream bed. It was a wild, swift stream, with no falls, but with a constant succession of shoals and rifts, with but few short, poollike still waters.

He looked down into the gorges with such emotions as ruin gives a man. He was tempted to spring down into the ice, and, stopping at one point, he did walk out on a ledge of granite which the wind had swept bare of snow to look at the stream far below. Looking, he witnessed the opening of the rifts by the passing down of the ice.

The stream seemed to invite him to leap, and he turned back to his cutter with some difficulty.

"I might's well quit," he pleaded, only to think, "I'll go on up; I'd better go on up!"

Beside him the telephone wires sang in the light, frosty breeze. Sometimes a length of wire would whistle, sometimes he passed a humming wire, and sometimes he heard a rattling, metallic growl. The various sounds distracted his attention. He kept looking at the wire, thinking how often he had called down to the mills over it, thinking how many loads of supplies he had ordered hauled up to the camp, and he had paid for the supplies as long as his money lasted. Then he had begged for and received credit. He owed a store, a blacksmith, a harness shop, and a hardware-supply company.

The thought of the debts pressed upon him, and he choked with emotion as he drove along. It seemed to him as though there was nothing left for him to do. If he jumped down into the stream that would end it, and that would also begin many unhappy things for his wife and three children, two of them schoolgirls, and a son who was a brave, strong lad.

He rode on with his sleigh bells ringing loudly in the night and the hoofs of his horse rattling on the crusty ruts of many sleds and sleighs. It seemed to him as though he had never had so many things to think about during his life, and among the things that mocked him were the glasses of liquor with which Betes had plied him sociably before getting down to the business of signing the contract. He had hardly recognized his signature, but it was properly witnessed.

"I was trapped!" Kame sobbed. "They got me foul and they caught me and now they'll sell my hide for the dirty money they'll make out of me having put down the timber and hauling it to the dump. They

get it free at the dump and they pay only the floating!" His wrath choked him. Never had he known before what it was to be helpless. He had realized how helpless he was, even while the manager slumped to the floor, his face broken under the fist of superior physical power. Groveling there, Betes was the better man; Betes had the log chains on Kame!

Kame went on up through the clearings to the big woods, and along the road to the log camps twenty miles from the mill town. He drove to the stable and put up his horse. It was a big, cold stable, but there was a warm little den for the light roadster, which began immediately to munch the oats and corn Kame threw into the feed box for it. Then he crossed to the camp just at dawn.

He walked out to the little shed under the trees a hundred yards from the camp, with big signs painted in red and black on all sides:

"DANGER!"

He found the snow shoveled from the door, and opened it with the key on his ring. In all directions from the shack ran squirrel tracks on the crust, and when he looked inside he found the eight boxes of sixty per cent to be used in breaking log jams on the stream stacked in the middle, with coils of fuse hanging on nails, and boxes of detonating caps in a cigar box nailed on a two-by-four beam of the frame. The squirrels had stacked a pile of leaves in the back of the shed and filled it with several bushels of beechnuts, hemlock cones, and seeds.

"Well, that'll sure do it!" Kame grimaced as he looked at the mass of explosive. "It's lucky I got it in here when I did."

He took down a fuse end and cut a length of about two feet and fitted a cap on it. Then he needed an ax to open one of the boxes. It occurred to him that he had better thaw the stuff out first, and with that he started for the lobby with one of the boxes. In the lobby, he began to thaw the sticks.

While he worked an idea came to him. He went out and brought in all the boxes of dynamite, and determined to thaw them.

"When I get ready to go," he said to himself, "I'll take the whole camp with me."

The narrow gorge where the dam stood reached all the way down to the mills, except for a few narrow flats. The water was backed upon over a thousand acres of old beaver meadow and lake. The overflow was more than four miles long and a half mile wide.

"I've a lot of water here. If I had a crew I could get those logs down in a hurry—" Kame mused, and then he thought: "I can get them down—"

He looked down the narrow valley. There were the logs on the ice, tens of thousands of them. They were stretched along for more than a mile, piled up in rows.

"I could do it, if—" He hesitated.

He laughed and cackled at the idea which now possessed him. Returning to the camp, he piled four of the boxes of thawed sticks on the wood sled and hauled them to the dam. He returned and brought down the other boxes, and then looked the cribbing and filling over for the best place to put the stuff

to lift the structure out of the way of the hundred million cubic feet of water held back by the dam.

"Yes, sir," he said to himself. "When that water starts I expect it'll take those logs right down to the boom—their that ain't washed out over the hills. Some'll get down!"

"I'll just go tell Betes what's coming," he said to himself. "It'll give him some ideas to look ahead to."

So he returned up the trail to the camp, two hundreds yards away, and, taking down the telephone, he called the Bandsaw Mills. The reply was gratifyingly prompt.

"I want to talk to Betes," he told the office.

"You'll have to get him at his house," the stenographer replied.

"What—he ain't sick, is he?" Kame asked.

"No, sir; he fell down stairs last night and hurt his face—"

"Yes, he did!"

"Really, he did!" the girl replied.

Kame laughed aloud.

"I can get him on the private wire, Mr. Kame, if you wish," she suggested. "He said important business could—"

"I wish you would," Kame assured her. "He'll think this is important."

Kame soon heard the muffled voice of Betes.

"Hello, Betes," Kame called cheerfully. "How are you?"

"I'm sore," Betes replied. "Don't you forget that."

"Well, I'm not," Kame assured him. "I'm all over being sore. I thought I'd tell you; I'm going to start those logs down all right."

"What—you got money?" Betes asked sharply and surprised.

"No—I'm a white-water man, you know; I'm pretty good on my feet. I'm going to start 'em right down. It's a one-man drive this time, so here goes. I thought you'd like to know it."

"Oh, what you giving me!" Betes jeered. "One man drive those logs down? Not in a hundred years!"

"Well, the ice was going out last night, and I thought—"

"It's all down against the boom this morning. Didn't know for certain if it'd stop." Betes laughed. "Broke chains on the inside strands. We got 'em fixed this morning, though. We're all ready for them; I'll telephone when the first log comes down."

Kame hesitated. Betes was mocking him.

"I mean it," Kame declared. "The drive begins to-day."

"Glad to know you found the money," Betes replied. "We couldn't do it, you know; it wouldn't be business to let you—"

"Money? I've no money!" Kame retorted.

"What? No money! How did you--what have you got to start 'em with—a song and dance?"

"No, sir, Mr. Betes, I've got no money at all. But I got it fixed all right. I got a tune they'll run to!"

"What have you got, credit? That's better than money. Good joke, Kame, dandy! Credit's sure better than money!"

"No, sir, it ain't money ner credit," Kame replied. "Better yet than that."

"I can't see how—"

"Let me whisper in yer ear, Betes," Kame called softly. "I got dynamite!"

"Dynamite! What good—"

"The reservoir is chuck-full, Mr. Betes, and the dynamite's in the dam, with the fuse laid. You'll be hearing of it likely in about ten minutes. I thought you'd like to sit by yer windy and see the logs come down into the boom—with two miles of water behind them—ah!"

Betes gasped. Kame listened for the signs of the man's anguish. Now the crooked manager caught the significance of what the tricked jobber had in mind to do—but not the full significance at that.

"You'll go to jail for twenty years!" Betes cried. "Why, they'll hang you! It'll wash the mills out—people will be—"

"Sure it'll wash the mills out, and your own house, where you set now, with them. That's what I intend. But I'll go up with the dam, old boy; no hanging for me! Good-by!"

"Wait! Wait! Man, you don't mean it!"

"Don't I? Listen!"

Kame caught up the watchman's rifle and fired it.

"Hear that?" he asked Betes.

Yes," breathlessly.

"That's a cap. I'll leave the receiver off and you'll hear the jar. Good—"

"Say, old man, I was only fooling," Betes cried. "We did not mean to hold you up. A gang of loggers will start up, your own men—"

"And take me wit' a sheriff's warrant! Not me, old boy! Too many fools have waited for that kind of game."

"I'll tell you, then; I'll send you money—"

"Too late, old man—"

"Then the contract, and a new one, signed to you. I'll send it by any one—and any one else that shows up you can kill."

"I think you are a dirty liar," Kame declared.

"I told you that if the logs came down you would be paid," Betes reminded him. "We live by the contract. I'll tell—I'll tell you the truth! The ice to-day broke the south crib and we could not let the logs come down till it's repaired and a new one built. If you set the dam down—Lord! You know what'll happen."

"Sure I do! But go on; your voice is music in my ear as I get ready to die—"

"You don't believe me! You wouldn't— Say! Say! Wait! I'll tell you! I'll bring in witnesses!"

"Call them in, and I'll hear you talk to them," Kame jeered. "'Tis sweet music, you scoundrel. I would hear you beg now!"

"I'm begging. Why, it'd ruin me to have the mills washed out!"

"Call over the telephone, then, and I'll listen. But mind! Now call for Jerry Wilks an' Tim O'Brien and Sam Higgins, all friends of mine. Yes, sir!"

Then Betes caught central, who had been listening in to see if they were through talking. Central called the hotel where Jerry was found, and Jerry brought Tim and Sam down to Betes' house, and they sat by while Betes talked to Kame over the wire. Then,

one by one, the three verified the statements that they were there and listening to Betes himself.

"Now tell them that I broke yer old face," Kame ordered, and he heard the narrative of what had happened the previous night, including Betes' statement to Kame that Kame must find money, as his credit was ended.

"Tell them why you choked me down!" Kame ordered, and he heard Betes explaining that if Kame could not bring the logs down he would not get the money, and that thus the company would profit by twenty-five thousand dollars.

The friends all told Kame that they had heard this statement. And Kame laughed with delight.

"I sure like to hear the scoundrel beg!" Kame said. "But I have no faith that he'll keep the contract here while he has the written contract," Kame declared to Jerry.

Jerry, a shrewd hotel keeper, who had been a log jobber himself, talked to Betes, and Kame could hear the gist of it.

"He says," Jerry called into the wire, "he says that he'll draw a check for five thousand—"

"Tell him to go to blazes!" Kame said. "He owes me twenty-five thousand this minute and five thousand for bringing the logs down. Tell him that!"

Jerry said just that.

"I'll draw my check for thirty thousand," Betes said.

"His own check is no good!" Kame declared. "Tell him a company check and have it certified."

In two minutes Jerry talked into the phone again.

"He says it shall be done; he's got the company check book here now, and he is drawing the check. And he is sending it to be certified at the bank."

"I'll wait, then," Kame answered.

In twenty minutes Jerry said:

"I have the check, certified and signed by the bank and by Betes, for thirty thousand, Kame."

"You mean it?"

"Sure I do!"

"Then beat it for the camp and I'll meet you on the way!" Kame shouted.

"That I will," Jerry chuckled.

So Kame went down the road, rifle in hand, and met his friend, who was behind a swift team in a good sleigh. He brought the check with him, and when Kame had read it tears rolled down his face, but he was laughing aloud.

"What now, Kame?" Jerry asked.

"You'll go down and pick me forty drivers that'll take the winter crop down easylike," Kame replied. "And I'll—well, I'll go make sure the logs and the water do not all go down the valley at once. I'll take the dynamite back to the red house."

"You meant it? You'd 'a' blowed the dam up!" Jerry exclaimed. "I thought you was bluffing!"

"Oh, no, Jerry, not me!" Kame grinned. "But if Betes would of thought twice he'd known the logs would have jammed within ten mile and never a log reached the dam—just a drop of water is all. So far it was a bluff—that he dared not call, and no man dared call, for the drop of water I'm mentioning would 'a' been the drop of water too much!"